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THE IMPACT OF COMMUNES IN CHINA

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Statement of Purpose

This analysis of Communist Chinese propaganda on the nationwide formation of agro-industrial communes is intended to point up the vastly increased political and economic as well as the cultural and ideological controls which the Communist authorities will acquire over the huge peasant population of the mainland, and to provide pertinent background on the development of the communes. The communal process is intended to speed up the reduction of the Chinese peasant into a completely "socialist man," a cog in the vast apparatus designed to extend Communist power and further Communist goals on the mainland of China. The commune is intended to subordinate further the interests and welfare of the Chinese masses to the requirements of the Communist state.

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Summary

Vastly increased control over the mainland population is implicit in the current Chinese Communist formation of agro-industrial communes and state-owned handicraft factories. This first step toward forced communization is directed toward total state control, organization and ownership of mainland assets with workers and peasants alike to receive fixed wages rather than shares in the unit's productivity. The larger agro-industrial units will permit easier central direction and indoctrination and will provide for firmer control of the activities, work assignments and thoughts of China's masses. The move, begun this spring at Mao Tse-tung's behest, appears designed to facilitate Communist China's intense drive for status in the socialist camp -- Peking is the only other nation in the camp beside the USSR to make the claim to be building Communism -- and to make possible an increased economic product supporting Peking's claim to "great nation" status. Achievement of these objectives, as in the past, will require further inroads into the masses' freedom and welfare.

## II. Communes to Replace Cooperatives as China's Basic Unit

Mao Calls for Communes: The new "basic social unit" in China's countryside is to be the agro-industrial "people's commune" encompassing "industry, agriculture, commerce, culture and education and the military," according to recent Peking announcements. The concept is attributed to Mao Tse-tung, in keeping with the current cult publicity surrounding the Chinese leader. According to CCP propagandist Chen Po-ta, writing in the mid-July issue of the Party's new ideological journal Red Flag, Mao recently directed that the CPR's general course should be to "organize industry, agriculture, commerce and trade, culture and education and the militia -- that is, the armed strength of all the people -- into a large commune which should form the basic unit of our society." The development was formalized on 29 August 1958 in a resolution of the Chinese Communist Central Committee.

Hasty Organization: According to current publicity from mainland China, the first communes were organized in April this year in Henan with the merging of small cooperatives into big ones -- the average ratio is about 10 - 1. By mid-summer the campaign had spread quickly to all of China and in early September reports claimed virtual completion of the communization in six provincial areas. Henan, the first to begin, was the first to announce completion of the task in early September. Virtually all other provinces and minority regions, after hasty establishment of experimental communes, were also well advanced in the transformation of their farm cooperatives and collectives and Peking reported that the communes would be established throughout the nation by harvest time this fall.\*

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\* The possibility that the plan for agro-industrial communes -- like that for cooperatives in 1955 -- has been controversial is suggested by the fact that it was not reported on in the Party resolution on agriculture adopted at the second session of the VIII CCP Congress held this May. The Party resolution approved the controversial 12-year agricultural plan only "in principle" and recommended that the Central Committee be assigned the task of "making revisions that may be necessary" in the light of future developments. The 12-year agricultural plan, originally approved by the CCP Politbureau in January, 1956, has been revised at least eight times since then and has been the subject of some public controversy. No direct criticism of the commune system has been publicized however.

Publicity Stresses Production Potential, Conceals Repression: Establishment of the communes on the mainland have been accorded rather more than normal publicity for a domestic topic and broadcasts from Peking have beamed the news to all audiences at home and abroad. Additionally the official Chinese Communist news agency, NCNA, has transmitted reports of the development of communes to its domestic and foreign consumers. Peking stresses the increased production potential of the communes; repressive features of the system are revealed only implicitly. The announcements of the completion of communal organizations in several provinces in early September occasioned a peak in broadcast attention with some 80 separate broadcast commentaries on the subject in the week 1 - 7 September. This accounted for over ten percent of all broadcast commentaries over Radio Peking for the period. The resolution of communes approved by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on 29 August was released and publicized heavily on 10 September -- 28 separate broadcasts carried the information to all audiences. In addition to the regular stress in home and regional broadcasts, news of the communes is broadcast most widely to Southeast Asia and to Overseas Chinese audiences, without apparent tailoring. As is customary, comment to date has made no attempt to portray the development of communes in China as one deserving of emulation by other nations.

Communes Necessary to Meet Accelerated Production Goals: The rationale advanced for the large-scale organization of communes throughout China is first and foremost an economic one: Peking on 20 August declared that "the superiority of the commune system has made it possible for the difficult and huge production assignments to be completed successfully." Just two days before Peking reported a People's Daily comment that the peasants had begun to realize that "small cooperatives could not meet the requirements of the 'big leap forward' in various fields, but had become an obstacle to the development of the productive forces." The paper added that it had become "urgent, under these circumstances, that the people's communes" be established.\* An account of Henan's experience stated:

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\* Controversy over China's ability to meet the rash goals for increased agricultural production was exposed publicly by both Liu Shao-chi and Tan Chen-lin, the Party's agricultural expert, at the May Congress sessions. Both referred to ranking Party cadres who opposed "reckless advance" and who were "waiting for the autumn harvests to settle accounts." Formation of the communes and amalgamation of small cooperatives seems part of the leaders' attempts to reach the high targets set. There is no indication that the disagreement over "reckless advance" included disapproval of the organization of the communes, although this may have been the case.

In view of the increasing demands of industrial construction and the need for improving the people's livelihood further, the masses of cadres and people recognized the urgent need of merging the small cooperatives into large ones in order to solve the shortcomings involving manpower and materials which were being concountered by the small farm organizations and to provide conditions for "building more, faster, better and more econemically."

Propaganda Claims Greater Discipline and Efficiency: Peking lists the following major advantages that communes will have over the smaller and less ordered cooperatives and collectives.

1. "The working efficiency of the peasants in the communes is, in general, 20 percent higher than in the agricultural cooperatives," according to a discussion of the question on 1 September. Comment stresses the more organized use of the available labor in specialized work brigades and notes especially the release of women for work both in the fields and in other communal activities. The final break-up of the traditional Chinese family system is predicated on the widespread development in the communes of public kitchens, nurseries, tailoring establishments and the like. One province alone claims that already seven million women have been released in this fashion from their household duties for more productive work. Even the aged and infirm are to be encouraged to undertake limited production assignments geared to their infirmities.
2. Establishment of the more disciplined communes will facilitate the "accumulation of common funds", according to Peking's plans. The ability of the regime, in short, to withdraw surplus funds and savings for state purposes and, at the same time, to supply less goods to the commune which instead will be expected to produce its own necessities of life, will be considerably enhanced.
3. The Peking regime expects a more rational and efficient use of the land in the large communes to bring about large crop increases which will in the foreseeable few years eliminate the food problem and provide first an average of 1,000 and later 1,500 catties of food per capita. At the same time, the planned introduction of primitive industry in the communes will add to the total industrial product and is expected in many things to make the commune self sufficient in necessary industrial and consumer goods. The State will thus be freed to pursue the goal of modernized heavy industry for defense needs, a goal which is currently (September) being reactivated on a priority basis.

4. The introduction of industry into the basic farm communities, it is hoped by the Chinese Communist authorities, will also facilitate the "elimination of differences between town and country, industry and agriculture and mental and manual labor." The establishment of factory brigades within the communes is expected to gradually provide the worker nucleus for more widespread expansion of industrialization in China in the future.

Existing communes, which average from 10,000 - 40,000 in membership according to local conditions, will have the advantage, the Chinese Communists declare, of "centralized control and unified management" and will develop and engage in all spheres of activity, including industry, agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, subsidiary occupations, marketing and supply, credit, culture and education, public health, and communications. The existing hsiang or administrative village is to be replaced by the commune and hsiang officials will staff the commune.

Emphasizing the advantages of centralized direction and unified management, the commune is set up on the basis of work brigades which can be assigned and utilized as deemed necessary. Current reports state that centralized deployment of work brigades has resulted in the sudden growth of communal industrial units and in the advance of such other projects as afforestation, flood control, irrigation, electrification, and primitive farm mechanization.

Private Property Eliminated: A major characteristic of the new commune is the system of "common ownership" which will universally deprive the peasants of the ownership of the few things left to him in the collectives -- private garden plots and tools. The new commune member will be permitted to retain only "a small number of domestic animals and fowl as private property." The private garden plots, it is directed, "will be taken over by the operational units [communal kitchens] of the people's communes for cultivating grain or vegetables for the joint consumption of the commune members."

Propaganda Lists Strengthened Political Control: The political motivation for the change to communal organization clearly includes the increased degree of control which the Party can exercise over larger units. Control which is presumably necessary to meet China's ambitious economic goals. In keeping with this, Chinese Communist propagandists call for strengthening Party leadership and perfecting the Party organizations within the commune. The Party, Peking adds,



must not only consolidate all rank-and-file Party cadres, but must also improve the methods of Party leadership, fully developing the roles of the Party, youth league, and women's organizations. It must also strengthen the Party's ideological-political program for the members within the commune and develop the "red and expert" Party activists.

Concomittantly, Chinese Communist propaganda lists labor discipline as one of the major characteristics of the new communes. Frequent reference is made to imposing "stern control over the fulfillment of the labor quota" assigned each commune member. Perhaps the greatest lever to be used in controlling the commune members is the newly adopted wage system whereby members who fail to work "enthusiastically" or are "lax" fail to receive a bonus — deducted from their wages in advance — or even to demotion in wage grade. Another important lever of day to day control over the commune members exists in the para-military organization established in the communes. According to an editorial in Red Flag, one of the Party's theoretical organs, commune members are to be "organized along military lines, do things the way battle duties are carried out." Red Flag adds that the swift expansion of agriculture demands that the peasants "quickly strengthen their organization, act more quickly and with greater discipline and efficiency."

Wage Coercion Outlined: A basic difference between the new communes and the former collectives is the adoption of a wage system for peasants in the communes. The new organizations will operate a "basic wage plus reward system" to replace the former "work-point system" of remuneration under the socialist collectives. Under the new wage system, Peking explains,

the amount of fixed wages will be paid to members according to the individual labor performances and work attitude, plus monthly and seasonal rewards. The commune has also set aside funds for rewarding those whose performances have been adjudged outstanding.

It is in the use of bonuses and rewards that the commune leadership can exert the greatest control. Eighty percent of the basic wage of each member will be paid him directly, but 20 percent will be withheld, to be returned only in the form of a bonus or reward for outstanding performance. A worker who fails to display the proper "enthusiasm" or is lax or fails to work the requisite number of days not only loses the 20 percent of his basic wage already withheld, but runs the risk of being demoted to a lower wage grade or of having further wages deducted. On the other hand, to qualify for a bonus, Peking requires that he be "obedient, enthusiastic, overfulfill production quotas, struggle against evil personalities and practices, think progressively and work at least 28 days per month." The pressure for conformity and production are thus increased manifold.

According to the draft regulations of one commune, "the distribution of income shall be based on the principle of ensuring high speed in expanded production." While the regulations call for increased wages as the rate of production goes up, the regulations prescribe not only that the rate of wage increase must be slower than the rate of increase in production, but also that when living standards reach the level of "well-to-do middle peasants," the rate of wage increase should be reduced to make possible greater accumulation for industry.

Financial Problems: Some problems are foreseen in the wage-income pattern of the communes. One involves the expected reaction of members of comparatively well-to-do cooperatives which are forced to merge and hence share their wealth with poorer cooperatives. The Party Secretary of Shansi Province, Tao Lu-chia, writing in the 16 May People's Daily, warned that "the existence of markedly well-to-do and markedly poor cooperatives side by side might well lead to a fierce class struggle." And a Henan conference declared that communes should strive to maintain a "reasonable ratio between the pay for labor contributed to agricultural, industrial and subsidiary production in order to avoid discord between members engaged in different types of work, thereby adversely affecting the practice of paying according to the contribution of labor."

Similar Changes in Handicraft Cooperatives to Meet Accelerated Goals: The handicraft cooperatives too are in the process of transformation into amalgamated units known as cooperative factories or state-owned factories operating under the "system of ownership by all the people." A report of a national handicraft conference held in Peking in September explained that

workers in cooperative and local state-owned factories are given back their shares in the cooperative and become wage workers. The local state-owned factory comes entirely within the system of ownership by all the people. The cooperative factory also comes within that system in essence, since the members no longer own shares and rely entirely on wages.

The report notes, however, that the cooperative factory "retains some elements of collective ownership," inasmuch as profits of the factory, after taxes, are returned to the management of the local handicraft cooperative.

Like the agricultural cooperative transformation, the changeover of the handicraft cooperatives is based on an admitted necessity for reorganizing to meet the accelerated economic goals. Acknowledging the difficulty of meeting the "heavy orders" for their products, Peking claims that

it is only by turning themselves into factories, changing the system of ownership, further emancipating the forces of production and coordinating more closely with the national economic plans that the handicraft cooperatives can achieve mechanized production speedily and better serve the country's socialist construction.

The handicraft conference is said to have agreed "in general" that "all handicraft cooperatives should be turned gradually into cooperative or state factories," and the change-over is reported to be underway all over the country. Approximately a tenth of the 5,000,000 handicraft members have been effected to date. The reorganization, it is reported, is proceeding under the leadership of the local CCP committee and with the guidance and help of "experienced workers provided by the Party organizations."

### III. Chinese Use of Soviet Experience

Khrushchev's Farm Plans: Peking's venturesome program to amalgamate its agricultural collectives into large agro-industrial communes bears some similarity to the program for the rapid merger of Soviet farm collectives begun in 1950 at the initiative of Khrushchev, then Politbureau spokesman on agricultural policy. The 252,000 farm collectives in the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1950 were rapidly reduced to 97,000 by October of 1952. Khrushchev advocated an even greater transformation in the countryside, and he recommended in 1950 and again in 1951 the formation of agrorods or agro-cities around which the new and larger collective farms would be organized.\* Presumably these agro-cities were to include industrial facilities, as now provided in the new Chinese communes. The Khrushchev plan of eight years ago was undoubtedly more ambitious than the current Chinese communal program, but it seems at least worth considering that the Chinese have borrowed from this original Khrushchev plan and adapted it to Chinese needs and circumstances, a technique which has become a hallmark of most Chinese comment on the usefulness of Soviet experience.

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\* Although Khrushchev's 1950-51 espousal of agrorods was immediately disavowed by the Soviet regime, it was seemingly returned to favor in August this year when Izvestia's 17 August editorial quoted from Khrushchev's 1951 speech and advocated the reconstruction of farm villages along the lines advanced by Khrushchev in 1950-51. Khrushchev's specific reference to agrorods however was not repeated in Izvestia.

Chinese Praise for Khrushchev Policies: Pertinent to possible influence on the Chinese of Khrushchev's original farm program is the observation that Chinese leaders have been unusually open in their approval of Khrushchev's policies, particularly his domestic policies. Chinese endorsement of current policies identified with Khrushchev is often far more direct than the customary endorsements from the rest of the socialist camp.

Outstanding in this regard was the speech of the CPR chairman, Mao Tse-tung, at the 40th Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution last November. Mao, alone among the foreign Communist leaders in Moscow for the anniversary, approved the domestic policies identified with Khrushchev, including opposition to the "anti-Party group," improvement of Party and political work in the armed forces and the decentralization of industry. He called the policies "wise measures" of the CPSU Central Committee.

Praising the successes which the CPSU's creative application of Marxism-Leninism to "practical tasks" had brought about in the Soviet Union, Mao declared:

The wise measures taken by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the questions of overcoming the cult of the individual, developing agriculture, reorganizing the administration of industry and construction, extending the power of the federal republics and local organizations, opposing the anti-Party group, consolidating unity within the Party and improving the Party and political work in the Soviet Army and Navy, will undoubtedly promote still further the consolidation and development of all undertakings in the Soviet Union.

And Mao added a reference, unusually laudatory even for the Chinese, to the usefulness and universality of Soviet experience.

The Chinese people are fortunate in having the experience of the October Revolution and of the socialist construction in the Soviet Union, which enabled them to make fewer mistakes, to avoid many others, and to pursue their cause fairly smoothly, although they still face many difficulties. It is clear that, after the October Revolution, if a proletarian revolutionary of any country should overlook or not seriously study the experience of the Russian revolution, of the proletarian dictatorship, and of socialist construction of the Soviet Union, and should fail to use these experiences analytically and in a creative way in the light of the specific conditions in his own country, he would not be able to master Leninism... and he would not

be able to solve the problems of revolution and construction in his own country correctly.

Chinese Follow Soviet MTS Decentralization: The most immediate example of that devotion to Soviet experience cited by Mao as of such importance to the future of China, as of other socialist states, occurred less than three months later. On 1 March 1958 the Communist China news service NCNA, and the principal Peking papers, carried extensive passages from Khrushchev's report on the reorganization of the Machine Tractor Stations (MTS) before the February plenum of the CPSU Central Committee. It was reported at the time that the Chinese papers "pointed out the great opportunities offered by the new measures." Just two weeks earlier, Peking had publicized an experimental program paralleling the Soviet plan to turn over farm machinery to the individual farm cooperatives.

But Peking, aware that implications of slavish copying of the USSR would adversely affect the Chinese population, advanced a claim to have adopted the program independently of the Soviet Union, stating

- (1) that the Chinese experimental program was worked out during the first five-year plan and
- (2) that the program for the decentralization of heavy farm machinery "had emerged from" economic and social conditions in China.

Peking had suppressed publication in China of Khrushchev's first announcement (22 January 1958 in Minsk) of the Soviet reorganization of the MTS and had publicized Khrushchev's second announcement in late February only after NCNA had released a report on China's own program based on Chinese conditions and needs.

While these observations are only suggestive, they all point strongly to the keen interest the Chinese have evinced in Soviet internal developments, and to the strong support they have advanced for Khrushchev's pragmatic approach to economic-political organizations. There seems little reason to doubt that Mao's unusually strong endorsement of Soviet experience and particularly of the internal policies advocated by Khrushchev evidenced an interest in utilizing Soviet planning in China's own economic course, with suitable revisions to fit the Chinese situation. Planning on the decentralization of the MTS must have been well underway in both the Soviet Union and China during this period. Furthermore, it is likely, but not at this time provable, that the Chinese leaders also developed an interest in Khrushchev's more advanced plans for agricultural development. The initial formation of China's first commune in April suggests that communal plans were being developed at about the same time as were those for reorganization of China's machine tractor stations, first discussed in February.

#### IV. Communes Provide First Step Toward Communism

Liu Shao-chi Implied New Ideological Status: Peking's claim to be engaged in "a social transformation leading from socialism to Communism," a claim advanced for the first time with the advent of the commune system, appears on the surface at least to be somewhat at odds with its customarily acknowledged status of "transition to socialism." This latter more modest stage, shared with other members of the socialist camp, was endorsed officially at the CCP's May sessions of the VIII Party Congress. The political resolutions of that Congress concluded that the purpose of the newly-adopted general line was "to build socialism." But closer perusal of the chief Congress documents, particularly the keynote speech delivered on behalf of the Central Committee by Party theoretician Liu Shao-chi, reveals some vacillation on the question of China's ideological status, with some broad hints of a more advanced stage in the offing.

On at least four occasions in his speech, Liu raised the issue of Communism as a stage to which China was currently aspiring. Taken together, Liu's argument appeared to be that

- (1) China has already completed, in the main, its socialist revolution on the economic front (in 1956) and on the ideological and political fronts (in 1957);\*
- (2) The CCP's new call for technological and cultural revolutions requires that China's "constantly developing revolution must now advance to a new stage";
- (3) This includes the duty to "consolidate and develop socialist ownership";
- (4) In order to achieve these ends, the Chinese are currently engaged in a "Communist ideological emancipation movement" in which a "mighty torrent of Communist ideas has swept away many stumbling blocks", and
- (5) In Lenin's words, this is "the actual beginning at Communism."

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\* China's farms were fully cooperativized in 1956, according to Peking reports, and were transformed into "fully socialist cooperatives" or collectives by the following year. This claim excludes certain minority areas which have been allowed to proceed at a slower pace in socialist reorganization. This far exceeded the pace originally recommended by Mao Tse-tung on 31 July 1955 when he called for a reversal of China's conservative agricultural policy. Mao had scheduled the completion of cooperativization for 1960 and collectivization within three five-year plans. The current drive for the formation of communes, by Peking's own admission, is being conducted at an even faster pace was the drive during 1955-57.



Expanding on what Liu Shao-chi termed Mao's belief in the Marxist-Leninist theory of "uninterrupted revolution",\* Liu argued that

on the eve of the victory of the democratic revolution

in 1949, the Party's Central Committee had outlined the future task of transforming the "new democratic state into a socialist state." By projection, Liu seemed to argue that with the virtual victory of socialism in China today, the transition to Communism need not wait for the loose ends to be tied up.

The CCP leadership at the Congress was obviously reluctant to spell out Liu's implications, as Party doctrine, and the Congress resolution stopped at the stage of "building socialism." But just two and a half months later, propagandists began their reference to China's transition to Communism within the specialized context of the formation of agro-industrial communes. Apparently the concept of the "uninterrupted revolution" is interpreted as authority for China both to complete the socialist transformation and at the same time, to proceed with the transition to Communism, at least in specified sectors of the nation.

Communist Stage No Longer Remote: Elite Peking propaganda has boldly underscored the fact that with the establishment of communes, China is actively experimenting with the form of Communism. The Central Committee resolution (29 August 1958) approving the communes states clearly:

It seems that the attainment of Communism in China is no longer a remote future event. We should actively use the form of people's communes to explore the practical road of transition to Communism.

The Central Committee admits that the introductory wage system is based on the system of "to each according to his work" rather than on the Communist principle of "to each according to his need," and that the transition to "common ownership" may take six years or even longer for the entire country. But following this, the Central Committee declares, only a "number of years" will pass before

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\* Although some writers have suggested a similarity between Mao's theory of "uninterrupted revolution" and Trotsky's theory of "continuous revolution", in fact there is a basic difference inasmuch as Trotsky's theory applied only to international events, while Mao's theory has been applied so far only domestically.

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Chinese society will enter the era of Communism where the principle of from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs will be practiced.

At that foreseeable time, according to the Party, "the function of the state is limited to protecting the country from external aggression but plays no role internally." The Chinese Communists therefore hold out the possibility, in the "no longer remote future", of the gradual withering away of the state.

Inasmuch as China has hitherto claimed only to be building socialism, or to be in the transition to socialism, this appears to be a calculated move to mount the ideological ladder quickly and attain the rung which the Soviets themselves only reached in February 1956 when they claimed finally to be building Communism at the XX CPSU Congress. However, even the Soviets have not been so forward in their anticipation of reaching the nirvana of Communism.

Similarity to Yugoslav Statements on Communes: In fact, Chinese Communist propaganda on both the Communes and the ultimate attainment of Communism and the withering away of the state seems matched only by the Yugoslavs. There is a striking parallel between current Peking proclamations and the pronouncements of the draft program of the Yugoslav Party this spring.\* The Yugoslavs, who first established communes in 1955 and reorganized them in 1957, appear to regard the communes as an essential step in preparation for Communism and the gradual withering away of the state. Arguing -- like the Chinese -- that the state can wither away only as its functions are replaced by other forms of socialist organization, the 1958 Yugoslav Party program explains:

As a political mechanism of management ... the commune represents a leading institution of direct socialist democracy which realizes the government of the working people through the working people themselves and for them. Taking over the management of social activities and having at its disposal the resources necessary to carry out these activities, the commune is not only and solely a school of democracy, but it is that democracy itself; it is the basic cell of self-management by citizens and their control of their joint activities.

Soviet pronouncements have generally avoided reference to the commune even on the theoretical plane.

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\* Criticism of Yugoslav revisionism has not apparently hindered Chinese awareness of Yugoslav experimentation. Both China and Poland adapted the Yugoslav system of workers' councils in 1956, but although Poland repudiated the system this year, China incorporated it in the new constitution of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions in late 1957, and apparently continues to utilize the form.